small. smart. seat pleasant.

Start smart:

5 ways to become a smart city today

Smart cities have the potential to solve fundamental human problems. Technology has changed the way we communicate, interact and collaborate. Emerging smart city technology allows cities to go beyond productivity, challenging fundamental urban environment challenges, including access to resources, social inequities, and sustainability, to name a few.

The smart city landscape is ever-changing and undefined. Seat Pleasant, Maryland defines and drives smart city initiatives by using technology to create a community where government, businesses, and residents are in sync and equipped to deliver the services people need and want. However, without a tangible definition, the idea of a world where every small city resident has access to smart technology can seem abstract.

“A lot of times, city leaders think ‘if we’re going to become a smart city, we have to spend $100 million and do all this crazy stuff’, but it’s often simpler.” says Mohamed Abdelhameid, director of the Center for Government Synergism for Seat Pleasant. “Put something online, for example, and you’ll save a lot of money off the bat. Small, streamlined examples can make a big difference when it comes to smart city initiatives and public services.”

Residents of Seat Pleasant, including Mayor Eugene Grant, have seen the impact that smart city initiatives have on their small city. With a population of 4,711 residents, the city has taken a comprehensive approach to its smart city transformation, developing a program that benefits government as well as local businesses and citizens. Seat Pleasant is committed to helping other communities achieve impressive improvements by helping other municipalities adopt, implement, and afford smart city technology through its small smart city model.

1. Institute policies to collect data and record information.

Identify what metrics need to be collected based on the highest priority items. For example, if deciding the annual budget is the most pressing agenda item, then collecting each department's use of resources is essential. Examine the data collected and analyze whether information is missing.

Previously, data collection wasn't a part of everyday business for the city of Seat Pleasant. When it began the transformation to a smart city in 2016, it quickly became apparent that instituting policies for data collection and recording information was critical. Then, city officials had to identify what missing data could be hindering each department from flourishing. City officials knew tracking information also entailed understanding *how* the city used each resource. What the city found was that sometimes services were used differently to better serve residents. The city's research found Public Works would kindly cut an elderly neighbor's grass, which is a great use of city resources; however, without documentation, personnel and time could not be accounted for, making it difficult to budget properly.

2. Audit department functions and streamline processes.

After identifying data that was not being collected or stored properly, Seat Pleasant created a series of workshops across departments to review all processes. These workshops addressed barriers to successful implementation and noted where efforts were duplicated by different departments collecting similar or overlapping information.

Once overlaps are identified and processes and communications are streamlined, find ways to insert technology. Cities can use technology to digitize and secure data collection and create cross-departmental communication lines. These solutions are typically inexpensive and can save time and resources.

3. Bring the community into the process.

Community members and leaders should also be included in smart city projects. Bringing residents into the conversation promotes citizen-centric decision-making and community buy-in. Beginning the dialogue early in the smart transformation process ensures governments are building cities *with* their stakeholders, providing the **city services** and resources they want.

Seat Pleasant held several meetings with community members while developing the small smart city framework. In 2018, the city created a master plan that included the community's preferences for services, businesses, **public safety** and quality of life. It informed the city's priorities, what **smart city initiatives** would be implemented and how to prepare residents for these changes. Read more regarding Seat Pleasant's Master Plan ***here***, then create one for your city.

4. Use data to conduct operations.

Adopting and examining big data can sometimes seem overwhelming. However, ***high tech*** can actually be a low-stress solution for cities interested in ***deploying smart*** solutions.

Seat Pleasant analyzed its data to allocate resources. The city used the information collected to develop budgets that better serve the community's needs, focusing on everything from ***public transportation*** to improving quality of life in an ***urban environment***. Further, the data allowed city leaders to anticipate needs before they even occur. For example, ***smart city technology*** allows cities to monitor traffic flows and anticipate road repairs before severe damage or accidents occur. Likewise, the city improved government service response times by developing the MySeatPleasant app, which increased response times by a full 90 percent.

Seat Pleasant also mobilized the local police department to pinpoint crime "hot spots," emphasizing policing efforts on the city's most problematic areas and expanding departmental capabilities. ***Machine learning*** led to ***real world*** success, including a whopping 70 percent reduction in crime and a 100 percent reduction in commercial robberies.

5. Expand your connections.

Smart cities like Seat Pleasant are all about connections and collaboration. The city launched a shared services hub in 2017, which allows municipalities to retrieve affordable **smart city technology** and gain access to a data network. The shared services hub also helps cities connect to discuss innovative resource allocations, inform local policies, and identify opportunities for high-tech partnerships.

Successful initiatives like these create goodwill and further support small smart city projects across the nation and the world. “One of the elements we’re especially proud of is expanded access to a network of city leaders, which makes it easier to share information, concerns and ideas for public services in Seat Pleasant,” concludes Mayor Grant.

Connect with a city official to learn more about bringing **smart city initiatives** to your small city at ***smallsmartcity.org***